Commended Paper's Anti-Fulbright Stand

Senators Rebuke CIA Chief for Writing Letter

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Central Intelligence Agency director Richard Helms was handed a spanking in the Senate yesterday for his letter-writing habits.

Even members of the Senate's exclusive CIA oversight committee said they were shocked.

Helms, Sen. Eugene McCarthy (D-Minn.) told his colleagues, had written a Letter to the Editor.

Not just any letter, mind you, but a letter commending the St. Louis Globe-Democrat for an editorial entitled "Brickbats for Fulbright."

"It was entirely out of place for him to have done that," McCarthy said, sinking the dagger into the CIA chief's cloak. "We are told that the CIA does not participate in domestic politics. This is a new departure."

The July 18 editorial rapped Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) for his Foreign Relations Committee's unsuccessful move to win three seats on the CIA oversight committee. It said the Senate had properly "rebuked" the "crafty Arkansan."

The Washington Post

RICHARD HELMS

In a letter published by the Globe Democrat on Wednesday, the CIA director said: "I want to let you know of my pleasure in reading the editorial, 'Brickbats for Fulbright' . . . It reflects so well your paper's policy of 'printing the news impartially, supporting what it believes to be right, and opposing what it believes to be wrong without regard to party politics."

McCarthy, who had offered the unsuccessful CIA resolution, said he supposed the editorial was "within the bounds of irresponsibility that should be allowed an editor."

But he envisioned future election campaigns with CIA letters commending criticisms of all sorts of Senators.

Helms, McCarthy said, 'owes an apology not only to the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and to every Senator who voted for the resolution, but to every member of the United States Senate."

From the St. Louis Globe-Democrat

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) called Helms' letter "a most serious matter" and hoped "it will not become a habit with him."

(In recent weeks, Helms has also written letters partly supporting Sen. Thomas J. Dodd (D-Conn.), who is facing misconduct charges, and backing an undercover CIA agent facing a slander suit.)

Sen. Leverett Saltonstall (R-Mass.), agreed the Globe-Democrat letter was "very, very questionable." Sen. Milton Young (R-N.D.) said it was "a shock" to him. And Sen. John Stennis (D-Miss.) called it "very unfortunate."

Fulbright said their words had the sound of music, coming as they did from three members of the oversight committee. He took the occasion to report rumors he'd heard of CIA dabbling in other "domestic affairs," such as various labor union elections.

"This is one of the problems you run into when you promote a career man," McCarthy said of Helms who took over as CIA director last month. "But he's a good fellow. I expect he'll adjust in time."

The spanking ended with a report from Saltonstall, who had stepped off the floor to call Helms.

"I asked Mr. Helms if he had written the letter and he said he had," the Senator announced. "He said it was a mistake and he was sorry."

Helms later said he also called Fulbright and said he was sorry again.